



The Evolving Federal Role

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From the Reagan to the Obama
Administration**

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**Steady Work: How Finland Is
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Learning System**

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**Urban Education Reform:
Recalibrating the Federal Role**

Warren Simmons

The Evolving Federal Role
Number 24, Summer 2009

Publisher
Annenberg Institute for School Reform
at Brown University
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Gilbert Design Associates, Inc.

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Voices in Urban Education (ISSN 1553-541X) is published quarterly at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. Articles may be reproduced with appropriate credit to the Annenberg Institute. Single copies are \$10 each, including postage and handling. A discount is available on bulk orders. Call 401 863-2018 for further information.

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform was established in 1993 at Brown University. Its mission is to develop, share, and act on knowledge that improves the conditions and outcomes of schooling in America, especially in urban communities and in schools serving disadvantaged children. For program information, contact:

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The Evolving Federal Role

Robert Rothman

From a look at the calendar of events in the nation's capital, Washington appears to be a hotbed of activity on education policy. Scarcely a day goes by without some kind of forum or announcement. The numerous think tanks that have sprung up in the past few years are constantly putting out reports, and Congressional hearings are packed. And all of that was the case *before* the 2009 economic stimulus bill dramatically increased the federal education budget.

It wasn't always this way. For much of the nation's history, the federal government had very little to do with education. With the exception of a few particular programs, like vocational education and curriculum-development projects, the federal role in education was quite limited, and local control reigned. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which for the first time provided general aid to local school districts, was enacted in 1965, and the U.S. Department of Education was created as a separate cabinet-level agency in 1979. This new federal attention focused on providing supplementary resources to schools serving low-income students and students with disabilities. Until that time, few would have looked to Washington as a center of education policy.

The federal role in school reform expanded in 1983 with the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the report that helped spur the national school reform movement that continues to this day. The report itself did not create a demand for greater federal involvement: it was issued by an administration that had

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pledged to abolish the Department of Education, and the report's recommendations were directed primarily at states. Yet, less than a decade later, following the momentum of this call for federal involvement, George H. W. Bush was campaigning to become the "education president," and he and his successors have put education high on their agendas. And now that President Obama has upped the ante with a large infusion of dollars, few believe the federal role is likely to recede to its previous level any time soon – indeed, many expect it to expand.

Yet precisely what the federal role ought to be and how federal funds ought to be used remains a topic of heated debate. Much of the think-tank activities and association reports that now flood the capital are aimed at responding to those questions.

In 2008, two reports, issued coincidentally on successive days, helped frame the issue. One, issued by a group known as the Education Equality Project, led by New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and the Reverend Al Sharpton, focused on schools, urging stronger accountability and performance pay for teachers. The other, by a group called the Broader, Bolder Approach, argued that schools alone could not ensure high levels of learning for all students and called for investments in early childhood education and after-school programs, in addition to reforms in schools.¹

Although much of the media attention on these two proposals attempted to draw a sharp contrast between them, there is much common ground. In fact, Arne Duncan, then-superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, signed both statements. Now, as U.S. Secretary of Education, he is in a position to implement

¹ The Annenberg Institute for School Reform is a signatory to the Broader, Bolder Approach.

them. And as the think-tank reports and forums continue, he has no shortage of advice on what to do.

This issue of *Voices in Urban Education* offers some additional ideas. It examines the federal role in education from a variety of perspectives.

- Gale Sunderman provides a historical perspective by showing how the federal role shifted during the Reagan and George W. Bush administrations and what is likely under President Obama.
- Linda Darling-Hammond describes Finland’s education system to show what a comprehensive national “teaching and learning system” would look like.
- Susan Neuman discusses some of the failures of federal programs and argues for investments that would change the odds for children in poverty.
- Heather Weiss, Priscilla Little, Suzanne Bouffard, Sarah Deschenes, and Helen Janc Malone recommend federal policies to support children’s learning outside of school.
- Warren Simmons considers ways the federal government could support the development of “smart education systems” that engage schools in partnership with communities to support children’s learning.

These articles show that federal policies focused on equity and excellence would take a comprehensive view and would address a broad range of issues to support children’s learning and development. They also suggest some policies that might be ineffective and things that the federal government might do well to *stop* doing. For example, as Linda Darling-Hammond points out, the testing programs in place in the United States in the past decade have not worked, at least compared with the more innovative testing programs Finland uses.

Yet, as Warren Simmons notes, any new federal policies will only be effective if the people they are intended to serve have a role in developing them.

The fear is that a relatively small group is at the table, developing ideas that might be at odds with the aspirations and experiences of communities who will implement them. If that continues, these policies might engender opposition and will not be sustained.

The good news is that the growing federal role has attracted the interest of a much broader group of parents and community leaders who are eager to join the table. Over the next few years, we will see if the next evolution of the federal role becomes as transformative as it can be.

The Federal Role in Education: From the Reagan to the Obama Administration

Gail L. Sunderman

The Reagan and George W. Bush administrations transformed the federal role in education, and the Obama administration is likely to maintain the current path.

The federal role in education has always been a sensitive one in American politics. Traditionally, the federal government has played a limited role and federal legislation has, normally, contained prohibitions against federal control of education. Indeed, local control of education is deeply engrained in the rhetoric and practice of American politics, where concerns about local control and liberty have far outweighed concerns about policy objectives.

Suspicion about federal power has been particularly strong among conservatives. Conservative views of federalism emphasize the prerogatives of state and local governments as the legitimate sources of policy and support the devolution of education and social programs to the states (Nathan, Gais & Fossett 2003). This view supports local decision making without interference from the federal government and assumes that states will invest funds in ways that will achieve particular policy goals.

Others have been less opposed to a federal role. Civil rights advocates and researchers supported a federal role in ending discrimination and desegregating public schools. Public education supporters have long seen the federal government as a means to improve the education of disadvantaged students and equalize funding for schools. The federal education programs enacted in the 1960s and 1970s expressed these aims by allocating federal funds for the education of previously neglected groups of students.

Federalism is deeply engrained in the U.S., where there are fifty independent state education systems with 15,700 local variations at the district level that are loosely regulated by the states (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Even so, this role has been evolving since the Reagan administration. This article examines how the federal role in education has changed and the forces that have pressed the United States towards greater federal involvement in education.

Central to understanding this evolution are the Republican administrations of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. As Republican administrations gained an understanding of the political saliency of education, they expanded the federal role in education to meet

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political and policy goals. During the Reagan administration, the release of the report *A Nation at Risk* was instrumental in shifting the policy agenda from equity to excellence and providing the administration a platform for advancing other policy preferences favored by conservatives (Sunderman 1995). With the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the George W. Bush administration reversed long-held conservative principles of limited government and a preference for local decision making.

The article concludes by considering the implications of these policy shifts for the direction the Barack Obama administration is likely to follow.

Policy Shifts under the Reagan Administration: From Equity to Excellence

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) marked the creation of an intergovernmental policy system where the federal government provided additional resources targeted at particular students. ESEA and other federal education policies that followed were important in expanding the federal government's provision of sustained categorical aid to elementary and secondary education and addressing national policy priorities that, for

the most part, had been neglected at the local level. These policies sought to equalize educational opportunity through integration and compensatory education and to redistribute resources to students who were deprived or who had been discriminated against under a system financed and controlled by state and local governments.

These federal education programs were based on New Deal assumptions that the great majority of the unemployed or impoverished were not personally to blame for their conditions. Instead, structural inequalities, resulting from racial discrimination, unemployment or underemployment, low wages, lack of education, and inadequate transfer payments were considered to contribute to the high unemployment and poverty of a particular group of people (Kaestle & Smith 1982; Kantor 1991; Levin 1982; Thomas 1983). Differences between the educational experiences of Black urban students and their White counterparts, for example, were seen to derive from the racial isolation of Black students in urban schools and from the unequal resources available to students in urban schools, which contributed to high dropout



rates, low achievement, and unemployment among Black students (Carson 1962; Council of Economic Advisors 1964; Harrington 1962).

Under this paradigm, the federal government was considered essential in addressing these problems. The use of federal authority to remedy social, economic, and education problems gained saliency in the 1960s as policies were adopted to address a number of national problems. Through a combination of federal grants-in-aid to assist in the financing and provision of educational programs considered to be in the national interest, national commissions, and media campaigns, the federal government sought to persuade state and local governments to address these national concerns. Major interest groups and the responsible state and local officials were actively involved in shaping federal grant programs and in determining how they were implemented (Feingold 2007; Peterson, Rabe & Wong 1986; Ripley & Franklin

1991). A rare exception to this collaborative approach was the use of federal power to advance civil rights in the 1960s (Orfield 1969).

The Reagan administration challenged both the workings of the intergovernmental system and the prevailing federal ideology. Consistent with conservative principles of a limited federal government, the administration sought to reduce the size of government through a reduction in entitlement spending and devolution of responsibility for service delivery to state and local governments. Called “new federalism,” the administration policy sought to replace categorical aid – under which the federal government determined the way funds should be spent – with block grants, which gave state and local governments more responsibility over the use of federal funds. There was an emphasis on deregulation and on weakening guidelines that restricted state and local discretion over program implementation. Decentralization was coupled with efforts to reduce federal aid, eliminate national programs, and cut the rate of growth in education and social spending (Walker 1986). Through these actions, the Reagan administration sought to decrease the federal role in education policy and establish a clear division of intergovernmental responsibility. The commitment, however, was to a shift in authority rather than a release of it and reinforced the trend toward greater state-level activity in the governance of education (Lowi 1984).

At the same time, the administration challenged the assumption that structural inequalities contributed to social and economic problems. The administration diagnosed the problem as the low overall performance of the schools rather than the needs of particular types of students. Low morale,

The Reagan administration sought to decrease the federal role in education policy and establish a clear division of intergovernmental responsibility. The commitment, however, was to a shift in authority rather than a release of it.

bureaucratization, and centralization of the public school system and politicization of educational issues were identified as major causes of educational deficiencies. Under this orientation, structural causes of educational inequality like concentration of poverty and racial segregation were replaced with an emphasis on individual and cultural deficiencies and the failure of educational bureaucracies. Two themes – moral conduct and the intrusion of government bureaucracy in the lives of Americans – were consistent throughout the administration. For example, Reagan’s discourse on the problems plaguing the schools concerned the morality of conduct where “learning has been crowded out by alcohol, drugs, and crime” (Reagan 1985).

The Emergence of Educational Excellence

Education gained greater national visibility after the release in 1983 of the report *A Nation at Risk*, which provided momentum for shifting the education debate from equity to a focus on excellence. This report linked the nation’s economic problems to the poor performance of the schools and argued that education played a crucial role in preparing students for the workplace. It recommended a broad set of policies to improve the school system that were aimed at enhancing educational productivity and efficiency. These reforms emphasized increasing achievement testing to measure student progress, adopting rigorous standards for all students coupled with increasing the teaching of basic skills, and improving the teaching profession by requiring

higher teacher standards and competency testing. Consistent with conservative views of federalism, it identified state and local officials as having the primary responsibility for financing and governing the schools and called on local government to “incorporate the reforms we propose in their educational policies and fiscal planning” (NCEE 1983).

The public response to *A Nation at Risk* impressed on the administration the importance of education as a political issue. By invoking education as an issue of national concern, the administration helped mobilize support for reform at the state level and had a platform to advance its own policy preferences, which included support for tuition tax credits, vouchers, school prayer, and a reduced federal role in education.

Both the administration’s philosophy of local control and the recommendations of *A Nation at Risk* contributed to an educational reform movement spearheaded by the states. This was the unconventional aspect of the excellence movement – that the states would adopt federally established policy goals. This was a reform movement where, within two years of the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, most states had initiated or enacted some of the educational reform measures suggested in the report – without federal fiscal incentives attached. This

The widespread adoption of the excellence reforms served to reinforce the role of federal policy-makers in defining and shaping an educational policy agenda and the central role of the states in education policy.

represented a sea change in the notion of policy diffusion. Until the excellence movement, there was the assumption, held by both policy-makers and researchers alike, that states responded to local conditions with policies that conformed to these conditions. Policy diffusion across states was a slow process that could take years if there were no federal fiscal incentives or sanctions attached to new ideas.

The excellence reforms gained widespread acceptance because they provided state policy-makers with a set of solutions that were carefully attuned to the political and economic exigencies of the time. By linking the excellence reforms to economic concerns about the changing position of the U.S. in the international economy, job security, and the future economic prosperity of the country, the report provided a powerful argument that these policies could correct the perceived problems in the educational system and real problems in the economy. This argument, also taken up by the Reagan administration, appealed to a public that had long believed that education could solve social

and economic problems (Sunderman 1995; Tyack & Cuban 1995).

The widespread adoption of the excellence reforms also served to reinforce the role of federal policy-makers in defining and shaping an educational policy agenda and the central role of the states in education policy. As such, it helped set the stage for the development of a formal national education agenda under the first Bush administration. Although the Reagan administration continued to adhere to the traditional conservative position of a limited federal role and support for local control, George H. W. Bush pledged to be an education president and made education a centerpiece of his domestic agenda. In 1989, President Bush and the nation's governors met and formulated six education goals to be achieved by 2000.

While this was a nationwide effort, the strategy was local and focused on bringing local communities into a network to learn about the goals and how to meet them. Governors were instrumental in advancing the concept of educational goals. When President Clinton took office in 1993, these initiatives continued as Goals 2000, which encouraged states and school districts

to set high content and performance standards in exchange for federal school reform grants. Both these initiatives included the idea of educational standards but relied on local adoption and implementation (and included federal incentives for states to develop and adopt standards). They strengthened the state role in regulating education by creating incentives for states to introduce laws and regulations to monitor local compliance with state requirements. Nevertheless, districts had considerable discretion in implementing the standards and aligning them with instruction.

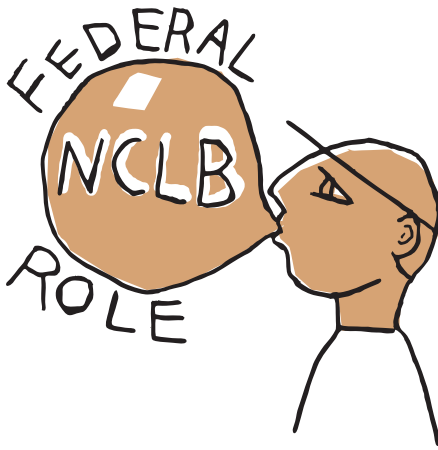
The passage of the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) in 1994, which reauthorized ESEA, provided further federal support for the standards movement by requiring states to develop and implement standards for all students, along with related assessments, in exchange for federal aid. But the law left it up to states to set their own standards and allowed states full autonomy to make instructional, governance, and fiscal policy decisions to support their academic and performance standards. Moreover, the law was weakly enforced and few states made substantial progress in meeting its requirements: as of 2001, only sixteen states were fully in compliance with IASA (Robelen 2001).

These factors prevented widespread state and local opposition to an expanded federal role in education and permitted states to mold the requirements to fit their local policy priorities and the capacity of their state agencies. As chronicled by the *Education Week* yearly report *Quality Counts*, adoption of strong standards and accountability systems and the extent of state testing varied widely across the nation (Boser 2001; Orlofsky & Olson 2001).

NCLB: An Expanded Federal Role in Education

While many of the NCLB concepts were present in a less-developed way under IASA, NCLB departs from its predecessor in significant ways: it marks an expansion of federal authority over programmatic aspects of education and raises the expectations of federal policy by emphasizing equal educational outcomes. In contrast to IASA, NCLB requires states to adhere to federally determined timelines for identifying failing schools and improving student achievement. States must establish performance standards and define adequate yearly progress goals that all schools, including Title I schools, must meet. Instead of reforms targeting special populations, states are required to bring all students up to a state-defined proficiency level by 2013–2014. By emphasizing equal educational outcomes, NCLB raises expectations for what schools must accomplish. Indeed, an important goal of NCLB is, as the statute states, to close “the achievement





gap between high- and low-performing children, especially gaps between minority and non-minority students and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers.”

With NCLB, the objectives of Republican reformers changed from limiting the federal bureaucracy and decentralizing decision making to the states toward expanding the federal role with an activist bureaucracy that assertively promoted particular political and policy goals. The Bush administration reversed long-held Republican doctrines by expanding the role of the federal bureaucracy in education but dodged the issue of local control by asserting that the law gives local school districts greater flexibility in the use of federal funds and by arguing that the new testing requirements do not dictate what is taught or how it is taught (Godwin & Sheard 2001).

Much like the Reagan administration, the Bush administration took an activist role in education policy because NCLB met the administration’s political and policy goals. Since Bush campaigned on an education agenda, the enactment of NCLB fulfilled his campaign promise. Until Medicare reform in November 2003, it was his only domestic policy accomplishment and an important issue of political symbolism. Politically, NCLB allowed the administration to say it did something to improve education, an issue that the American public cares about. And, much as the Reagan administration did during the educational excellence movement in the 1980s, by adopting an issue that traditionally was dominated by the Democrats, the administration was able to claim education as its own issue.

Several provisions in NCLB also appealed to the ideological agenda of the administration’s constituencies. Support for supplemental educational services and public school choice are the prime examples. These policies reflect a faith in market approaches that is a consistent theme in conservative politics. There was a belief within the administration, for example, that supplemental educational services are going to “bring schools out of improvement status as student achievement goes up.” The testing and accountability provisions appealed to the business community, another Bush administration constituency. The business community had been advocating stronger accountability since the Reagan administration, when it was instrumental in advancing the excellence reforms (Sunderman 1995).

Finally, NCLB reinforced the idea that social and economic causes of poverty can be discounted as causes of poor performance. The idea that

economic and racial inequities are connected to schooling inequality was replaced with a rhetoric that students of all racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds can learn. Instead of addressing structural causes of inequality, NCLB suggests that low achievement will improve if students, teachers, and schools work harder. While this rhetoric may suggest a greater focus on equal educational opportunity, it allows policy-makers to make education the sole social and economic policy (Kantor & Lowe 2006; Rothstein 2004).

Direction of Education Policy under the Obama Administration

On one level, the Obama administration has recognized that many parts of NCLB are unworkable. But other than to articulate a need for better assessments, Obama was silent on many of the tough issues related to NCLB – such as the 100 percent proficiency requirement and adequate yearly progress – during the presidential campaign and in the early days of his administration. Nonetheless, the administration has signaled its commitment to accountability, standards, and assessments and has adopted rhetoric that links economic progress and educational achievement. It has also advanced the idea that our educational system is in decline (Obama 2009; Duncan 2009). During a period of severe economic crisis, this approach inextricably ties education to solving social and economic problems.

By all indications, the Obama administration will continue expanding the federal role in education. While it is

unclear at this writing how the administration will address the issues raised by NCLB, other indicators suggest that it will expand federal power over additional areas now exclusively under the control of state or local governments. Two sources provide clues on the direction the administration plans to take – the 2010 budget proposal and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), or the federal stimulus law. The administration is using the federal stimulus law to push states and districts to adopt particular policies the administration supports. States with restrictive charter school laws, for example, have been informed that this may hurt their chances to receive stimulus money (Quaid 2009).

The Obama administration has also voiced strong support for teacher performance pay, an area typically decided locally between unions and local school districts (the 2010 budget provides incentives for districts to create pay-for-performance programs), as well as support for alternative pathways into education (Obama 2009). The administration's support for charter schools, performance pay, and alternative pathways signals a willingness to consider market approaches to education, even when there is a lack of research on their effectiveness.

Finally, while the 2010 budget reflects some changes in funding priorities – additional money for Title I for school improvement, an expanded focus on high school reform, and increased funding for educational research (Klein 2009) – it does not represent a significant change from the Bush administration and reflects a continuation of the trends begun under the Reagan administration. The shift in federal policy that began a quarter century ago is likely to continue.

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Steady Work: How Finland Is Building a Strong Teaching and Learning System

Linda Darling-Hammond

Finland offers an example of how a nation built a comprehensive “teaching and learning system” that has raised achievement and closed achievement gaps.

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The aim [of Finnish education policy] is a coherent policy geared to educational equity and a high level of education among the population as a whole. The principle of lifelong learning entails that everyone has sufficient learning skills and opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in different learning environments throughout their lifespan.

— Government of Finland, Ministry of Education

It is exhausting even to recount the struggles for equitable funding in American schools, much less to be engaged in the struggles, year after year, or — much more debilitating — to be a parent or student who is subject day by day, week by week to the aggressive neglect often fostered in dysfunctional, under-resourced schools.

One wonders what we might accomplish as a nation if we could finally set aside what appears to be our de facto commitment to inequality, so profoundly at odds with our rhetoric of equity, and put the millions of dollars spent continually arguing and litigating into building a high-quality education system for all children. To imagine how that might be done, one can look at nations that started with very little and purposefully built highly productive and equitable systems, sometimes almost from scratch, in the space of only two to three decades.

In this article, I briefly describe how one nation — Finland — built a strong educational system nearly from the ground up. Finland was not succeeding educationally in the 1970s, when the U.S. was the unquestioned education leader in the world. Yet it created a productive teaching and learning system by expanding access while investing purposefully in ambitious educational goals using strategic approaches to build teaching capacity.

I use the term “teaching and learning system” advisedly to describe a set of elements that, when well designed and connected, reliably support all students in their learning. These elements ensure that students routinely encounter well-prepared teachers who are working in concert around a thoughtful, high-quality curriculum, supported

by appropriate materials and assessments – and that these elements of the system help students, teachers, leaders, and the system as a whole continue to learn and improve.

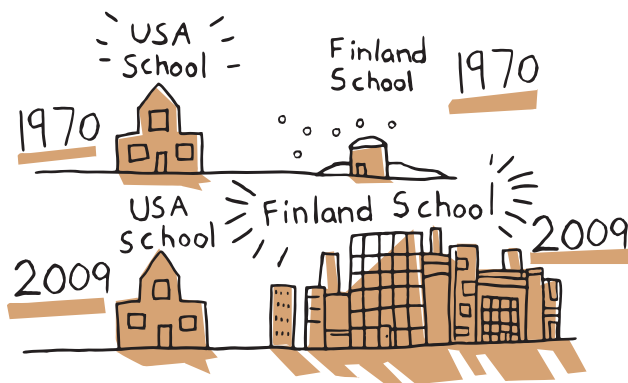
While Finland continues to experience problems and challenges, it has created a much more consistently high-quality education system for all of its students than has the United States. And while no system from afar can be transported wholesale into another context, there is much to learn from the experiences of those who have addressed problems we encounter. A sage person once noted that while it is useful to learn from one's own mistakes and experiences, it is even wiser to learn from those of others. This story is offered with that goal in mind.

The Finnish Success Story

Finland has been a poster child for school improvement since it rapidly climbed to the top of the international rankings after emerging from the Soviet Union's shadow. Once poorly ranked educationally, with a turgid bureaucratic system that produced low-quality education and large inequalities, it now ranks first among all the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessments in mathematics, science, and reading. The country also boasts a highly equitable distribution of achievement, even for its growing share of immigrant students (NCES 2007).

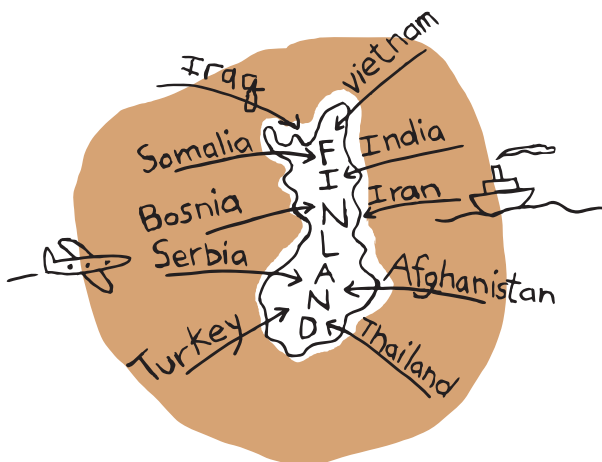
In a recent analysis of educational reform policies in Finland, Pasi Sahlberg (2009) describes how since the 1970s Finland has changed its traditional education system “into a model of a modern, publicly financed education system with widespread equity, good quality, large participation – all of this at reasonable cost” (p. 2). In addition to the gains in measured achievement, there have been huge gains in educational attainment at the upper secondary and college levels. More than 99 percent of students now successfully complete compulsory basic education, and about 90 percent complete upper secondary school (Statistics Finland 2009). Two-thirds of these graduates enroll in universities or professionally oriented polytechnic schools. And over 50 percent of the Finnish adult population participates in adult-education programs. Ninety-eight percent of the costs of education at all levels are covered by government, rather than by private sources (NCES 2007).

Although there was a sizable achievement gap among students in



the 1970s, strongly correlated to socio-economic status, this gap has been progressively reduced as a result of curriculum reforms starting in the 1980s – and continued to grow smaller and smaller in the 2000, 2003, and 2006 PISA assessments. By 2006, Finland’s between-school variance on the PISA science scale was only 5 percent, whereas the average between-school variance in other OECD nations was about 33 percent (Sahlberg 2009; NCES 2007). Large between-school variation is generally related to social inequality, including both the differences in achievement across neighborhoods differentiated by wealth and the extent to which schools are funded and organized to reduce or expand inequalities.

Not only is there little variation in achievement across Finnish schools, the overall variation in achievement among Finnish students is also smaller than that of nearly all the other OECD countries. This is true despite the fact that immigration from nations with lower levels of education has increased sharply in recent years, and there is more linguistic and cultural diversity for schools to contend with. Although most immigrants are still from places like Sweden, the most rapidly growing newcomer groups since 1990 have been from Afghanistan, Bosnia, India, Iran, Iraq, Serbia, Somalia, Thailand, Turkey, and Vietnam; new immigrants speak more than sixty languages. Yet, achievement has been climbing in Finland and growing more equitable, even as it has been declining in some other OECD nations.

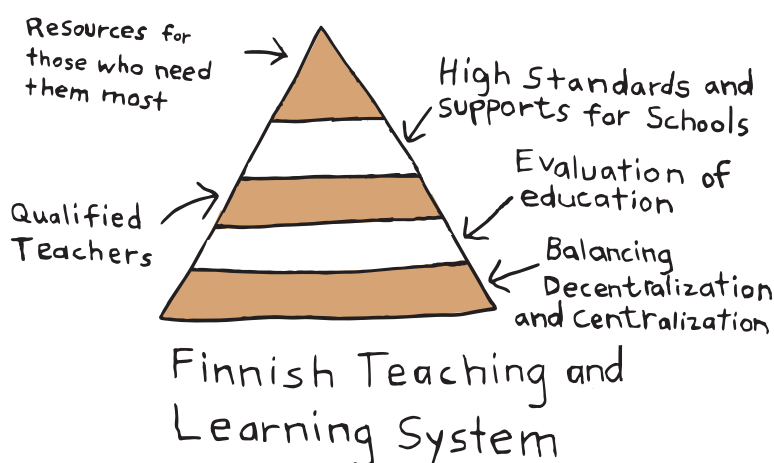


Strategies for Reform

Because of these trends, many people have turned to Finland for clues to educational transformation. As one analyst notes:

Most visitors to Finland discover elegant school buildings filled with calm children and highly educated teachers. They also recognize the large autonomy that schools enjoy; little interference by the central education administration in schools’ everyday lives, systematic methods to address problems in the lives of students, and targeted professional help for those in need. (Sahlberg 2009, p. 7)

However, less visible forces account for the more tangible evidence visitors may see. Leaders in Finland attribute these gains to their intensive investments in teacher education – all teachers receive three years of high-quality graduate-level preparation, completely at state expense – plus a major



overhaul of the curriculum and assessment system designed to ensure access to a “thinking curriculum” for all students. A recent analysis of the Finnish system summarized its core principles as follows (Laukkanen 2008; see also Buchberger & Buchberger 2003):

- Resources for those who need them most
- High standards and supports for special needs
- Qualified teachers
- Evaluation of education
- Balancing decentralization and centralization

The process of change has been almost the reverse of the progression of policies in the United States. Over the past forty years, Finland has shifted from a highly centralized system emphasizing external testing to a more localized system in which highly trained teachers design curriculum around the very lean national standards. This

new system is implemented through equitable funding and extensive preparation for all teachers. The logic of the system is that investments in the capacity of local teachers and schools to meet the needs of all students, coupled with thoughtful guidance about goals, can unleash the benefits of local creativity in the cause of common, equitable outcomes.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has been imposing more external testing – often exacerbating differential access to curriculum – while creating more inequitable conditions in local schools. Resources for children and schools in the form of both overall funding and the presence of trained, experienced teachers have become more disparate in many states, thus undermining the capacity of schools to meet the outcomes that are, ostensibly, sought.

Finnish policy analyst Sahlberg (2009) notes that Finland has taken a very different path. He identifies a set of global reforms, undertaken especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries, that Finland has not adopted, including

standardization of curriculum enforced by frequent external tests; narrowing of the curriculum to basic skills in reading and mathematics; reduced use of innovative teaching strategies; adoption of educational ideas from external sources, rather than development of local internal capacity for innovation and problem solving; and adoption of high-stakes accountability policies, featuring rewards and sanctions for students, teachers, and schools. By contrast, he suggests:

Finnish education policies are a result of four decades of systematic, mostly intentional, development that has created a culture of diversity, trust, and respect within Finnish society, in general, and within its education system, in particular. ... Education sector development has been grounded on equal opportunities for all, equitable distribution of resources rather than competition, intensive early interventions for prevention, and building gradual trust among education practitioners, especially teachers. (p. 10)

Equity in opportunity to learn is supported in many ways, in addition to basic funding. Finnish schools are generally small (fewer than 300 pupils), with relatively small class sizes (in the twenties), and are uniformly well equipped. The notion of caring for students educationally and personally is a central principle in the schools. All students receive a free meal daily, as well as free healthcare, transportation, learning materials, and counseling in their schools, so that the foundations for learning are in place (Sahlberg 2007). Beyond that, access to quality curriculum and teachers has become a central aspect of Finnish educational policy.

Improving Curriculum Content and Access

Beginning in the 1970s, Finland launched reforms to equalize educational opportunity by eliminating the practice of separating students into very different tracks based on their test scores, along with the examinations previously used to enforce it. This occurred in two stages between 1972 and 1982, and a common curriculum was developed throughout the entire system through the end of high school. These changes were intended to equalize educational outcomes and provide more open access to higher education (Eckstein & Noah 1993). During this time, social supports for children and families were also enacted, including health and dental care, special education services, and transportation to schools.

By the late 1970s, investment in teachers was an additional focus. Teacher education was improved and extended. Policy-makers decided that if they invested in very skillful teachers, they could allow local schools more autonomy to make decisions about what and how to teach – a reaction against the oppressive, centralized system they sought to overhaul.

This bet seems to have paid off. By the mid-1990s, the country had ended the highly regulated system of curriculum management (reflected

in older curriculum guides that had exceeded 700 pages of prescriptions). The current national core curriculum is a much leaner document – featuring fewer than ten pages of guidance for all of mathematics, for example – which guides teachers in collectively developing local curriculum and assessments. The focus of 1990s curriculum reforms

form, emphasizing descriptions of their learning progress and areas for growth (Sahlberg 2007). As is the case with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams in the United States, samples of students are evaluated on open-ended assessments at the end of the second and ninth grades to inform curriculum and school investments. The focus is on using information to drive learning and problem solving, rather than punishments.

Finland maintains one exam prior to attending university: the matriculation exam, organized and evaluated by a Matriculation Exam Board appointed by the Finnish Ministry of Education. While not required for graduation or entry into a university, it is a common practice for students to take this set of four open-ended exams, emphasizing problem solving, analysis, and writing. Teachers use official guidelines to grade the matriculation exams locally, and samples of the grades are reexamined by professional raters hired by the Matriculation Exam Board. Although it is counterintuitive to those accustomed to external testing as a means of accountability, Finland’s use of school-based, student-centered, open-ended tasks embedded in the curriculum is often touted as an important reason for the nation’s success on the international exams (Lavonen 2008; FNBE 2007).

The Finnish National Board of Education describes the approaches used for curriculum and assessment on its Web site (FNBE 2007). The national core curriculum provides teachers with recommended assessment criteria for

There are no external standardized tests used to rank students or schools in Finland, and most teacher feedback to students is in narrative form. The focus is on using information to drive learning and problem solving.

was on science, technology, and innovation, leading to an emphasis on teaching students how to think creatively and manage their own learning. As Sahlberg (2009) notes:

Rapid emergence of innovation-driven businesses in the mid-1990s introduced creative problem-solving and innovative cross-curricular projects and teaching methods to schools. Some leading Finnish companies, such as Nokia, reminded education policy-makers of the importance of keeping teaching and learning creative and open to new ideas, rather than fixing them to predetermined standards and accountability through national testing. (p. 20)

Indeed, there are no external standardized tests used to rank students or schools in Finland, and most teacher feedback to students is in narrative

specific grades in each subject and in the overall final assessment of student progress each year. Local schools and teachers then use those guidelines to craft a more detailed curriculum and set of learning outcomes at each school, as well as approaches to assessing benchmarks in the curriculum. According to the FNBE, the main purpose of assessing students is to guide and encourage students' own reflection and self-assessment. Consequently, ongoing feedback from the teacher is very important. Teachers give students formative and summative reports both through verbal and narrative feedback.

Inquiry is a major focus of learning in Finland, and assessment is used to cultivate students' active learning skills by asking open-ended questions and helping students address these problems. In a Finnish classroom, it is rare to see a teacher standing at the front of a classroom lecturing students for fifty minutes. Instead, students are likely to determine their own weekly targets with their teachers in specific subject areas and choose the tasks they will work on at their own pace. In a typical classroom, students are likely to be walking around, rotating through workshops or gathering information, asking questions of their teacher, and working with other students in small groups. They may be completing independent or group projects or writing articles for their own magazine. The cultivation of independence and active learning allows students to develop metacognitive skills that help them to frame, tackle, and solve problems; evaluate and improve their own work; and guide

their learning processes in productive ways (Lavonen 2008).

An orientation to well-grounded experimentation, reflection, and improvement as a dynamic cycle for individual and organizational learning characterizes what students are asked to do in their inquiry-based lessons, what teachers are asked to do in their professional problem-solving and curriculum development, and what schools are asked to do in their drive for continual progress. Sahlberg (2007) notes: "A typical feature of teaching and learning in Finland is encouraging teachers and students to try new ideas and methods, learn about and through innovations, and cultivate creativity in schools, while respecting schools' pedagogic legacies" (p. 152).

Improving Teaching

Greater investments in teacher education began in the 1970s with expectations that teachers would move from three-year normal school programs to four-to-five-year programs of study. During the 1990s, the country overhauled preparation once again to focus more on teaching diverse learners for higher-order skills like problem solving and critical thinking in research-based master's degree programs. Ian Westbury and colleagues (2005) suggest that preparing teachers for a research-based profession has been the central idea of teacher education developments in Finland.

Prospective teachers are competitively selected from the pool of college graduates – only 15 percent of those who apply are admitted (Buchberger & Buchberger 2003) – and receive a three-year, graduate-level teacher-preparation program, entirely free of charge and with a living stipend. Unlike the U.S., where teachers either go into

Teacher training emphasizes learning how to teach students who learn in different ways, including those with special needs. The egalitarian Finns reasoned that if teachers learn to help students who struggle, they will be able to teach all students more effectively and, indeed, leave no child behind.

debt to prepare for a profession that will pay them poorly or enter with little or no training, Finland – like other Scandinavian countries – made the decision to invest in a uniformly well-prepared teaching force by recruiting top candidates and paying them to go to school. Slots in teacher training programs are highly coveted and shortages are virtually unheard of.

Teachers' preparation includes both extensive coursework on how to teach – with a strong emphasis on using research based on state-of-the-art practice – and at least a full year of clinical experience in a school associated with the university. These model schools are intended to develop and model innovative practices, as well as to foster research on learning and teaching. Teachers are trained in research methods so that they can “contribute to an increase of the problem-solving capacity of the education system” (Buchberger & Buchberger 2003, p. 10).

Within these model schools, student teachers participate in problem-solving groups, a common feature in Finnish schools. The problem-solving groups engage in a cycle of planning, action, and reflection/evaluation, which is reinforced throughout the teacher education. This process is, in fact, a model for what teachers will plan for their own students, who are expected to conduct similar kinds of research and inquiry in their own studies. Indeed, the entire system is intended to improve through continual reflection, evaluation, and problem solving, at the level of the classroom, school, municipality, and nation.

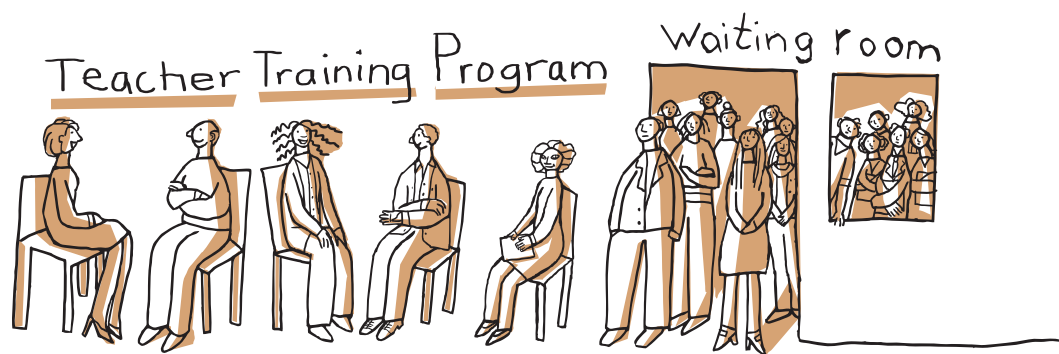
Teachers learn how to create challenging curriculum and how to develop and evaluate local performance assessments that engage students in research and inquiry on a regular basis. Teacher

training emphasizes learning how to teach students who learn in different ways, including those with special needs. It includes a strong emphasis on “multiculturality” and the “prevention of learning difficulties and exclusion,” as well as on the understanding of learning, thoughtful assessment, and curriculum development (Buchberger & Buchberger 2003). The egalitarian Finns reasoned that if teachers learn to help students who struggle, they will be able to teach all students more effectively and, indeed, leave no child behind.

Most teachers now hold master’s degrees in both their content and in education, and they are well prepared to teach diverse learners – including special needs students – for deep understanding and to use formative performance assessments on a regular basis to inform their teaching so it meets students’ needs (Laukkanen 2008; Buchberger & Buchberger 2003). Teachers are well trained both in

research methods and in pedagogical practice. Consequently, they are sophisticated diagnosticians, and they work together collegially to design instruction that meets the demands of the subject matter as well as the needs of their students.

In Finland, like other high-achieving nations, schools provide time for regular collaboration among teachers on issues of instruction. Teachers in Finnish schools meet at least one afternoon each week to jointly plan and develop curriculum, and schools in the same municipality are encouraged to work together to share materials. Time is also provided for professional development within the teachers’ workweek (OECD 2005). As is true in many European and Asian nations, nearly half of teachers’ school time is used to hone practice through school-based curriculum work, collective planning, and cooperation with parents, which allows schools and families to work more closely together on behalf of students (Gonnie van Amelsvoort & Scheerens 1996). This



The focus on instruction and the development of professional practice in Finland’s approach to organizing the education system has led to an increased prevalence of effective teaching methods in schools.

compares to only three to five hours per week available to most U.S. teachers for lesson planning – conducted independently, without the benefit of colleagues’ thinking. The result is that:

Finnish teachers are conscious, critical consumers of professional development and in-service training services. Just as the professional level of the teaching cadre has increased over the past two decades, so has the quality of teacher professional development support. Most compulsory, traditional in-service training has disappeared. In its place are school- or municipality-based longer-term programs and professional development opportunities. Continuous upgrading of teachers’ pedagogical professionalism has become a right rather than an obligation. This shift in teachers’ learning conditions and styles often reflects ways that classroom learning is arranged for pupils. As a consequence of strengthened professionalism in schools, it has become understood that teachers and schools are responsible for their own work and also solve most problems rather than shift them

elsewhere. Today the Finnish teaching profession is on a par with other professional workers; teachers can diagnose problems in their classrooms and schools, apply evidence-based and often alternative solutions to them and evaluate and analyze the impact of implemented procedures. (Sahlberg 2007, p. 155)

The focus on instruction and the development of professional practice in Finland’s approach to organizing the education system has led, according to all reports, to an increased prevalence of effective teaching methods in schools. Furthermore, efforts to enable schools to learn from each other have led to what Michael Fullan (2005) calls “lateral capacity building”: the widespread adoption of effective practices and experimentation with innovative approaches across the system, “encouraging teachers and schools to continue to expand their repertoires of teaching methods and individualizing teaching to meet the needs of all students” (Sahlberg 2007, p. 167).

A Finnish official noted this key lesson learned from the reforms that allowed Finland to climb from an inequitable, mediocre education system to the very top of the international rankings:

Empowerment of the teaching profession produces good results. Professional teachers should have space for innovation, because they should try to find new ways to improve learning. Teachers should not be seen as technicians whose work is to implement strictly dictated syllabi, but rather as professionals who know how to improve learning for all. All this creates a big challenge . . . that certainly calls for changes in teacher education programs. Teachers are ranked highest in importance, because educational systems work through them. (Laukkanen 2008)

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Federal Policies to Change the Odds for Children in Poverty

Susan B. Neuman

The experience of the last decade suggests that new directions in federal policies are needed to improve educational outcomes for children in poverty.

In the current debates over policies to improve educational outcomes, particularly for low-income children, Susan B. Neuman occupies a rare position as both a researcher and a policy-maker. At the University of Michigan School of Education, where she is a professor of educational studies, she directs the Michigan Research Program on Ready to Learn. Previously, she directed the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, focusing on early childhood policy, curriculum, and early reading instruction, pre-kindergarten to grade 3.

From 2001 to 2003, she was Assistant U.S. Secretary of Education for elementary and secondary education. There, she helped establish the Reading First and Early Reading First programs and the Early Childhood Professional Development Program, and she was responsible for administering No Child Left Behind in its initial stages.

Her most recent book, *Changing the Odds for Children at Risk* (Praeger Publishers, 2008), outlines seven principles for improving outcomes for low-income children.

Neuman spoke with *Voices in Urban Education* editor Robert Rothman about the federal role in improving education.

Susan B. Neuman is a professor of educational studies at the University of Michigan School of Education.

Looking broadly, what would you say are the parameters for the federal role in education?

Clearly, there's an interest in improving standards and making them more rigorous. As we've seen with the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, there's an effort to standardize those standards across states and to move to a more singular measure of achievement and proficiency. That's one key issue that the feds are very, very interested in promoting and encouraging.

A second issue is teacher quality. There's a greater effort to focus on performance pay for greater achievement, and they're going to use various mechanisms to ensure that will happen.

I think there is another emphasis on entrepreneurship. What you'll see with the "Race to the Top" dollars is an emphasis on innovation and change and school improvement and multiple models for school improvement.

Another emphasis will be on reforming and improving states' ability to gather longitudinal data and ensure that all kids are counted in graduation

rates. [There's an effort to improve] the ability to collect more data than ever before.

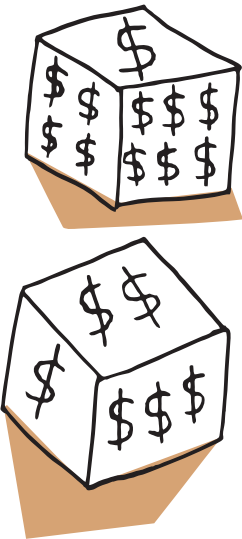
From your experience in the federal government and your work elsewhere, do you think these are appropriate areas for the federal government to be involved in? Or is it overstretching its capacity or appropriateness?

I think some of these things are a waste of time. I don't think that improving standards – making standards more rigorous – is going to really affect achievement or improve the quality of instruction. I don't think international benchmarking is going to do that at all. I think the federal government is missing the mark focusing on these kinds of issues where they're really not capable of following and monitoring them very well. We have examples of their limitations in trying to implement some of the law in No Child Left Behind. This is only getting more involved in local matters than ever before.

There is a consensus that the federal role has expanded with No Child Left Behind, and now there is an interest in doing even more, as you mentioned. Do you think the genie can be put back in the bottle and the federal government could take on a humbler role, more akin to what it was doing before?

I don't think so. What we're seeing is a consensus on both sides of the aisle, Democrats and Republicans, feeling that schools have failed our children, that we are not up to international standards, and that we have to improve significantly.

If the Republicans had their way, they would have stronger accountability systems and allow locals and the states to have greater innovation. As long as there was a strong accountability system, they would allow for greater



I don't think that improving standards – making standards more rigorous – is going to really affect achievement or improve the quality of instruction. I don't think international benchmarking is going to do that at all.

entrepreneurship in many ways. I think the Democrats, however, traditionally want to create new laws and new programs to ensure that [improvement] happens.

I think that they are going to find that this is extremely difficult to implement. They'll have to fail before they realize that it cannot be done. I know that sounds pessimistic.

Teacher Quality: Choosing the Right Levers

Let's look at one example of something you were involved with: teacher quality. No Child Left Behind, for the first time, set federal guidelines for teacher quality. You have argued that this was, if not a failure, an effort that did not achieve its goals. Why do you think that this happened?

Number one is the definition [of teacher quality]. They had to focus on policy levers that they could control. The three policy levers were: a teacher would have to have a BA; she would have to have subject-matter expertise, which they defined as either coursework or some kind of ability to pass a

test; as well as a credential. One of the things I questioned was the theory of action: whether those three components actually defined what is a high-quality teacher.

They spent an enormous amount of money and enormous amounts of red tape on this. At the very beginning of the Bush administration, they sort of ignored this effort, preferring to work on the issue of accountability. But the Democratic Congress eventually caught up with them and said, you're not implementing this the way it was intended. And so they became more rigorous in their implementation strategy. They went to states, they tried to figure out state credentialing guidelines, and they got into the weeds of various state government strategies for credentialing what constituted knowledge.

So by the end of a great deal of effort – eight years of effort – essentially, they could say that more teachers abided by what they defined as highly qualified teaching. What I suggest is that there's no evidence that teacher quality has improved a smidgen. There's no evidence in terms of the national assessments; there's no evidence in terms of any anecdotal information that teacher quality is better now than ever before. I call this a failed effort – spending enormous amounts of dollars, enormous numbers of resources, making teachers do things that were not terribly helpful, and I don't see any benefit in the long run.

Is there an appropriate federal role in setting guidelines for teacher quality, and what might that be?

I questioned whether this was an appropriate theory of action. I think most of us who deal with teacher education would say that these three components do not constitute good

So by the end of a great deal of effort, more teachers abided by what they defined as highly qualified teaching. There's no evidence that teacher quality has improved a smidgen.



teaching. So then we have to ask, what *does* constitute good teaching? We have some evidence indicating that teachers who are very effective create a climate that supports children's learning. They are interactional – involved with the school. They take their profession very seriously. I think one of the things we have to question is whether that is a lever – a possible lever – and I suggest perhaps no. It would be very difficult for a federal guideline to suggest we want this level of climate and make it happen.

I suggest that the goal of No Child Left Behind's teacher quality provision was really about ensuring that high-poverty kids got the same quality of teacher that middle-class and upper-middle-class kids get. I don't think those components that are currently in the law or what [President] Obama and [Secretary of Education] Arne Duncan are proposing actually will improve teacher quality for children who are in poverty.

There are some levers that would attract teachers to high-poverty communities. Most of us who are teachers really want to improve children's achievement. We'd love the challenge of being able to go somewhere and actually increase children's scores. The way to do that is to improve the climate for teachers to go into those high-poverty settings. That means that one of the levers could be, for example, school facilities. Many of the schools in high-poverty areas have fallen apart. Their roofs leak; teachers are teaching in the bathrooms; there's no space. So one of the strategies to attract teachers would be not to necessarily give them performance pay – I don't see how that's going to work – but to give them better facilities so that they can do their work.

A second lever could be to give them more control – to allow teachers to actually have control of their schools. So if they do their job, some of the red tape that they have to go through would be waived, recognizing that what they are doing is good – almost like what [Chancellor] Joel Klein had proposed for New York.

[A third would be to] make schools intellectually vibrant: give them professional development funds so that teachers can learn from other teachers. Support coaching and mentoring so that teachers can get the kinds of professional development that will really enable them to do their work better.

Another strategy is to make schools smaller and allow class size to diminish so that teachers can talk to children and interact more.

I see those as possible levers for teacher quality [that will] ensure that teachers will go into schools of challenge, rather than issues like performance pay or the current teacher quality initiatives.

Improving Supports Outside of School

You've been involved in developing the Broader, Bolder Approach framework. That idea suggests that focusing on schools alone is not sufficient to ensure high levels of student learning. What should the federal government be doing to advance that agenda?



Both the Broader, Bolder Approach and my book, *Changing the Odds for Children at Risk* (Neuman 2008), basically argue that the average day for children in our schools is only six hours. They have nine months, with lots of vacation. If we're really to change the odds for our children, we have to ensure that there are safer communities, that there's more parental involvement and family support, that we get other institutions, like early education and after-school programs, working together to ensure that these kids get a more 360[-degree] surround or intervention – an intensive intervention with a high dosage that makes this all possible.

What I'd recommend, and there is a little bit in President Obama's budget, is a community-based initiative that supports a greater connection between these services. As you know, for children who come from high-poverty circumstances, these are often very, very disconnected. You have to apply for each one individually. When I was doing my book, I found that some children had seventeen different services, all requiring different types of criteria and requirements. So I think one of the strategies could be to have a community-based initiative where all of these services begin to work together following similar standards, similar mechanisms of defining accountability, and working together to ensure kids' achievement.

It's important that we have an aligned system – that we don't think of schools as separate from communities and families separate from schools, that we work toward a horizontal and vertical alignment of programs.

*That would begin with early childhood,
right?*

Absolutely. But I even start earlier. The early-childhood programs are obviously imperative, but one of the things I'm absolutely delighted President Obama is funding is Early Head Start. That really works with parents in utero. It helps them make sure that they get healthy services, that they go to their doctors, that they get prepared for having children, preparing them for the kinds of cognitive stimulation kids really need, as well as the social interaction that's so important.

I strongly believe that parents want to do the right thing. But so many environmental constraints occur for families in poverty, so getting them the family supports – the nurse–family practitioner program and some of those other programs – to ensure that they get off to a good start is every bit as important as early childhood education, which often kicks in at ages three through five.

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The Federal Role in Out-of-School Learning: After-School, Summer Learning, and Family Involvement as Critical Learning Supports

Heather B. Weiss, Priscilla M. D. Little, Suzanne M. Bouffard, Sarah N. Deschenes, and Helen Janc Malone

By providing support for the learning students do outside of school, the federal government can help build a comprehensive, complementary learning system.

This article is based on a longer paper written by the authors for the Center on Education Policy, as part of a series entitled “Rethinking the Federal Role in Elementary and Secondary Education.” It is excerpted and reprinted with the permission of the authors and CEP. The complete paper is available at <www.cep-dc.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=536&parentID=481>.

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The dominant assumption behind much current educational policy and practice is that school is the only place where and when children learn. This assumption is wrong. Forty years of steadily accumulating research shows that out-of-school, or “complementary learning” opportunities are major predictors of children’s development, learning, and educational achievement.

The research also indicates that economically and otherwise disadvantaged children are less likely than their more-advantaged peers to have access to these opportunities. This inequity substantially undermines their learning and chances for school success. To solve this problem, we must imagine what the solution would look like.

The Vision: A Continuous, Comprehensive, Complementary Learning System

Imagine the following scenario, with the hypothetical student Marcus and his mother Maria.

Marcus is seventeen years old. He lives in a public housing development with his younger sister and his mother, Maria, who makes minimum wage

cleaning houses. When she was pregnant with Marcus, Maria went to her community health clinic and told her doctor, “I want to be a better parent than my mother. I want my kids to go to college, but I don’t know anybody who went to college. How do I help my kids get there?”

Maria’s doctor referred her to the local community center, which had strong partnerships with the health clinic and the local school district. At the community center, Maria enrolled in a parenting class. Although initially nervous, she liked the instructor and the strategies she learned for helping Marcus learn. She began reading to him and taking him to the children’s museum. She also received home visits from educators at the center, who showed her effective discipline strategies. The biggest benefit of the center, she thought, was meeting other parents to share information, stories, and ambitions for their children.

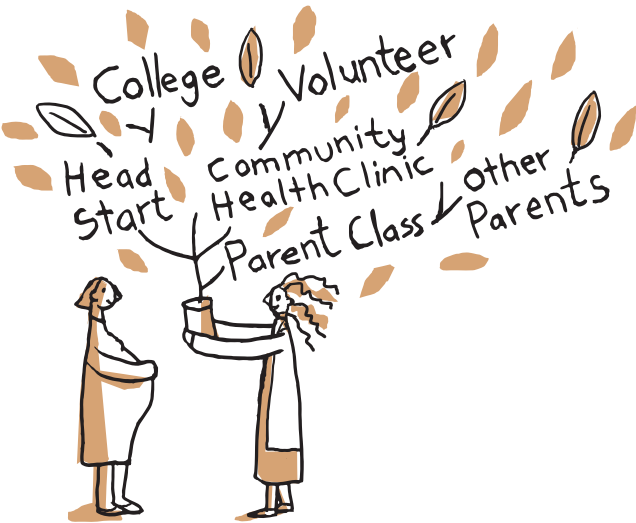
When Marcus was almost three, a family liaison from the local school district came to the community center to talk to parents about the importance of pre-kindergarten classes and tell parents about the school where their children would attend kindergarten. “We have the same goal you do – to

help your kids succeed all the way to college,” she said. After the family liaison’s visit, Maria enrolled Marcus in the center’s Head Start program and began volunteering once a month. The school district’s family liaison became a regular presence, stopping by the center to provide information, answer questions, and refer parents to the school district’s own parenting seminars.

The summer before kindergarten, the family liaison and the school principal led a tour of the local public school and set up a meeting with Maria, Marcus, a staff member from the school’s after-school program, and Marcus’s advisor – another teacher who would advise Marcus throughout his elementary school years. Together, they developed a plan for getting Marcus all the way to college. The plan – they called it a learning compact – explained what each person would do to help Marcus succeed. Every semester for the rest of elementary school, the group would meet to review Marcus’s grades, discuss his progress, and assess whether each person was fulfilling his or her responsibilities.

Maria, who had never had good relationships with her own teachers, quickly warmed to the teachers and other staff. When the principal saw her at the school one morning, he personally invited her to volunteer and she gladly accepted. The principal also told her about the school-based health clinic and Maria began scheduling immunizations and regular visits for Marcus.

After Marcus’s (and Maria’s!) successful transition to kindergarten, Marcus thrived in elementary school. During one of the learning compact meetings, the after-school director, who had noticed Marcus’s talent for singing, encouraged him to sing in the



church choir and helped him apply for and win a scholarship to a summer arts program. She and Marcus’s reading teacher at school also worked together to help him write songs based on the books he was reading in class.

Before Marcus moved on to middle school, the learning compact team introduced Marcus and Maria to his new middle school team, a process that was repeated before he entered high school. In eighth grade, the team began discussing Marcus’s goal of becoming a music professor, including how to apply to and succeed in college. They discussed what Marcus could do after school and during the summers to help achieve his goals. Maria also attended



a “financial aid” night cosponsored by the school, local universities, and the after-school recreation program.

Now in the spring of twelfth grade, Marcus is ready to graduate and has been accepted – with scholarships – at four different colleges. With a lifelong network of learning supports in place, his path to college and career is wide open.¹

Core Features of a Complementary Learning System

To access the learning opportunities and a pathway to educational success as described in our story of Marcus and Maria, children like Marcus need a continuous, comprehensive, and complementary learning system, the

components of which have a shared vision for learning and educational success. The individual services and programs described above already exist, but parents like Maria may find their high expectations for their children frustrated by their lack of experience in navigating the educational system. A piecemeal approach increases the chances that they will fall through the cracks and will not have access to all of the learning supports necessary to maximize success (for example, after-school and summer programs). In our story, Maria and Marcus found and followed a pathway to college because their community had intentionally created a complementary learning system to connect the existing stepping-stones.

Complementary learning refers to the idea that a systemic approach, which intentionally integrates both school and out-of-school learning supports, can better ensure that all children have the skills they need to succeed in school and in life. As in our story of Maria and Marcus’s community, complementary learning systems require that stakeholders come together to create a system with a set of core features.

1. *A commitment to ensuring access to complementary learning for disadvantaged children and their families*

Currently, disadvantaged children and their families have less opportunity to experience complementary learning than their more-affluent peers. Thus, they don’t experience the rich set of learning opportunities that the research suggests is essential to positive learning and developmental outcomes, thus fur-

¹ The vision of an effective complementary learning system described in this story is inspired by the work of Edmund Gordon on supplementary education, Dennie Palmer Wolf at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and Paul Tough of the *New York Times*; The School Transition Study; The Home Visit Forum; schools and teachers nationwide; and local and national programs that provide the kinds of services mentioned here.

ther widening achievement gaps. This is true both for family involvement, where we see differential patterns in involvement based on socio-economic factors as well as educator outreach, and for access and participation in after-school and summer learning programs, where we see differences in participation based on socio-economic status.

2. A systemic approach to supporting the role of families in learning.

Parents who are involved early and throughout the school years have children who are more likely to enter school ready to succeed and to graduate and go to college. Further, families play a critical role in accessing and sustaining participation in a network of quality learning supports. Many families lack the social and political capital necessary even to know about learning opportunities for their children, let alone make to good choices among these opportunities. Thus, a systemic approach to family involvement is one that helps families understand the value of continuous learning of all kinds and offers the network of supports necessary for that learning.

3. Access to an array of quality comprehensive and complementary supports from birth through adolescence.

Complementary learning starts at birth and continues through adolescence. Home visiting and early childhood programs set children on a path to school readiness; participation in after-school and summer learning programs affords children and youth access to crucial developmental supports and opportunities that prepare them for later success in life. Health and economic supports are also necessary precursors to children's being prepared to learn. Throughout the child's development,

families remain a core out-of-school learning support that should interface with all others.

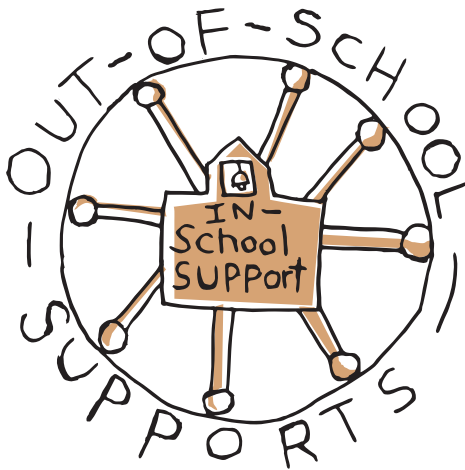
4. Focus on a range of academic, social, and behavior skills.

From birth through adolescence, access to an array of out-of-school learning supports promotes learning both directly and indirectly, building skills and knowledge as well as the conditions for learning (for example, motivation and engagement, social skills, and health). They help to address achievement gaps and the challenges that living in poverty pose for children's educational and life outcomes and build the skills they need to become successful citizens, parents, and workers.

5. Alignment and connection of out-of-school supports to schools and to each other to maximize learning and developmental outcomes.

Across a child's development, aligned and connected supports aid important educational transitions and ensure that children and youth get on and stay on pathways to learning and life success.

The individual services and programs already exist, but parents may find their high expectations for their children frustrated by their lack of experience in navigating the educational system. A piecemeal approach increases the chances that they will fall through the cracks.



Key features of alignment include:

- common learning and development goals among all partners
- information systems to ensure that information about students is shared across supports
- shared best practices and professional development opportunities
- shared accountability
- multilevel relationships that cross local and district school leadership
- formalized mechanisms for communication
- shared governance structures

6. *Recognition that there are multiple ways by which localized complementary learning approaches can be implemented.*

Approaches to implementing complementary learning can and should vary depending on the needs and resources of any given community. Leadership for complementary learning can be housed within a school, in a community-based organization, or across a community in the form of education councils, but efforts to develop complementary learning need to be co-constructed among all educators and providers in a community.

The Federal Role in Out-of-School Learning

At the federal level, policies and legislation play an important role in enabling such complementary learning efforts. Yet historically, and moving forward, the work of implementing out-of-school learning has been and will continue to be the responsibility of local schools, districts, and communities, with money from disparate funding streams passing through the states to them.

Thus, the role of the federal government in complementary learning is not to implement programs, but rather to enable local innovation, show leadership, support accountability and quality, and use other legislative and regulatory tools to ensure that complementary learning occurs locally. Some recent federal legislation, such as the Full-Service Community Schools Act and the proposed Education Begins at Home (EBAH) Act, enables states and communities to implement complementary learning efforts that best suit their local needs.

The Need for a New Era of Federal Leadership

With the passage of the historic Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, the President and Congress declared that it was in the national interest for the federal government to take on national educational leadership and funding roles to ensure equal educational opportunity for disadvantaged children (Jennings 2001). As the name of the act indicates, the assumption was that elementary and secondary schools, unassisted, would manage to level the playing field for disadvantaged children. But more than forty years of research since ESEA confirms that America will not achieve its national goals of equal educational opportunity, leaving no child behind, or preparing its workforce and citizenry for twenty-first-century challenges without addressing the inequities in out-of-school learning opportunities as a major component of education reform.

As in 1965, national leaders should use the bully pulpit, as well as federal leverage and funding, to enable states, counties, and communities to make the shift toward more complementary learning. This leadership can capitalize on growing national, state, and local momentum and readiness to shift to a broader education reform strategy that redefines what learning is, who enables it, and when and where it takes place. Whether they describe it as a “broader, bolder approach,” “a new day for learning,” or comprehensive, extended, or complementary learning, numerous educational organizations, nonprofit and professional groups, elected officials, and business and citizen groups are calling for inclusion of these broader educational opportunities and supports.

Investing in a Systemic and Aligned Approach to Learning

The recommendations that follow are intended to move the current federal role in out-of-school learning from investments in individual out-of-school supports to investments in supports that are networked and aligned with schools and then to a full vision of complementary learning, which calls for seamless delivery of comprehensive learning and developmental supports across the day, across the year, and across a child’s development from birth through adolescence.

Collectively, these five recommendations comprise the federal role in developing, implementing, and testing a national strategy for complementary learning. They lead to a final recommendation: drafting and passage of the

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Pathways to Educational Success Act of 2009, confirming federal leadership and support for a new era of educational innovation and reform.

1. *Use federal leadership, the bully pulpit, funding, and leverage to promote equitable out-of-school learning opportunities and integrate them into the center of the education reform discussion; enact and fully fund legislation that will enable states and communities to implement more continuous, aligned, and systemic efforts to educate all children.*

Using its leadership role, the federal government can shift the national mindset about where and how children learn toward an understanding that schools are a core, but not sole, contributor to educational success. Federal leadership that puts the national spotlight on the importance of out-of-school learning and its alignment with schools, that supports innovation in the areas of learning and accountability, and that builds a long-term strategy to achieve complementary learning will, in turn, leverage sustainable state and local change.

Marginal change is insufficient to enable states and communities to make the necessary fundamental transformations in how we define and organize learning.

Immediate action such as the creation of a high-level position in the U.S. Department of Education with responsibility for all out-of-school learning and its alignment with schools would signal the importance of this change. New legislation and modifications of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) allowing flexibility in the use of Title I, Supplemental Educational Services (SES), and other funding streams for complementary learning services and linkages is also necessary. In addition, new and existing higher-education legislation should take into account both immediate and longer-term needs for professional development for all those involved in complementary learning, including teachers, administrators, and after-school and summer-learning providers.

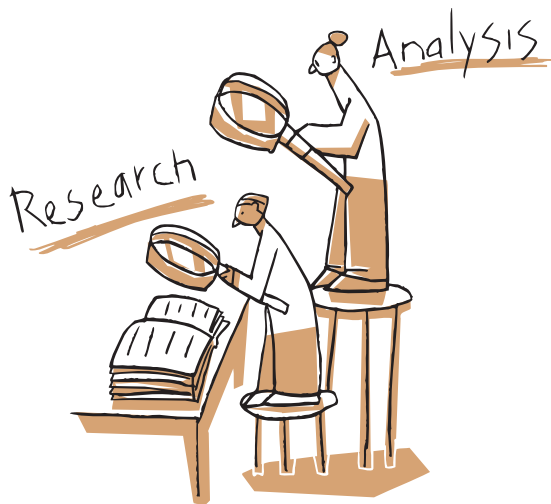
2. *Promote innovation to implement continuous, comprehensive, complementary learning systems at the local level.*

The types of changes envisioned here will require the federal government not just to serve as regulator and agent of accountability, but also to stimulate and fund innovation. Marginal change is insufficient to enable states and communities to make the necessary fundamental transformations in how we define and organize learning. Arguing that the research and development infrastructure for school improvement is currently weak and that this constitutes a case of “market failure for educational innovation,” Anthony Bryk and Louis Gomez (2008) recommend that innovations be co-developed by interdisciplinary researchers, practitioners, and social entrepreneurs with a commitment to continuous improvement (p. 182). They suggest that innovations must be co-developed by

researchers and practitioners within a continuous-improvement approach.

Both researchers and policy-makers applaud the emphasis on research-based educational policy and programs. However, they are increasingly recognizing the limits of existing research alone to solve our most pressing educational problems and are calling on the government to fund innovative new approaches to ensuring that many more children reach proficiency (Joftus 2008). In order to promote innovation to implement continuous, comprehensive, complementary learning systems at the local level, we recommend that the federal government do the following.

- Develop a strategic national research, development, and innovation agenda and leverage private and philanthropic dollars, as well as public funding, to support it.
- Use federal leadership and leadership dollars to encourage and support state and local innovation to test new complementary learning approaches and evaluate existing ones within a framework of learning, continuous improvement, and accountability.
- Use research actively to support more effective policy and practice. Share lessons from ongoing innovations to support learning and continuous improvement across states and communities; continue to disseminate information about effective initiatives and programs through mechanisms such as the What Works Clearinghouse (www.whatworks.ed.gov) as part of the national commitment to learning, continuous improvement, and accountability.



3. *Support accountability across all components of a complementary learning system, including schools and out-of-school learning supports.*

Accountability is now part of American education. The passage of NCLB in 2001 brought a clear emphasis on outcomes, explicit requirements for standards and assessment systems, and more transparent accountability. In doing so, it significantly raised expectations for states, local education agencies, and schools: all schools are now expected to meet or exceed state standards in reading and math by 2014.

While there has been much debate about the merits of NCLB as an education reform strategy, there is some consensus that its emphasis on accountability – which, in the end, revealed that many schools were failing to meet adequate yearly progress

standards – has been instrumental in shaping the realization that “schools can’t do it alone.” In that sense, NCLB has contributed to current thinking about the importance of out-of-school learning as complementary to school-improvement strategies. Thus, any new efforts to reform education must be coupled with efforts to reform and strengthen – not shy away from – an accountability system that can target improvement strategies to specific schools and districts, as well as identify the localized network of out-of-school supports that can best complement those schools and districts. In order to reform our current accountability system, we recommend that the federal government take leadership through the following actions:

- *Broaden the frame of accountability to include twenty-first-century skills.* Unlike the current accountability system, with its narrow focus on math and reading, an accountability system for complementary learning needs to take into account the attainment of proficiency in a broader set of skills, beyond the “Three Rs,” to include assessments of critical thinking, civic engagement, and teamwork. This is largely uncharted territory for the federal government and will require different, and broader, thinking about desired outcomes for children.
- *Expand methods of assessment.* Expanding the frame of accountability requires changing the ways in which progress toward outcomes is assessed. Alternative assessments, such as portfolios and measures of school climate, can augment more traditional approaches to assessment to provide a more complete picture of what is possible in a complementary learning environment.
- *Integrate data systems across learning supports to ensure progress on a shared vision for learning.* Disadvantaged children and youth have inequitable access to out-of-school supports, and part of the federal role is to ensure greater access to them. If the federal government is to know if its investments in out-of-school supports are reaching the children who need them, local out-of-school learning supports that receive federal resources must have systems for tracking participation across the full array of available supports in the community. Only in this way can progress toward equity be monitored and assessed. In addition to monitoring for equity and access, data systems should be linked in order to better understand the whole range of services a child receives and how this affects that child in the long term.

Though the federal role in integrated local data systems is extremely limited, the federal government could show leadership in this area by supporting the development of integrated data systems as part of its investments in research, demonstration, and innovation sites. Mechanisms that bring multiple community stakeholders together for regular progress updates

and action planning already exist (see, for example, McLaughlin & O'Brien-Strain 2008). These should be examined and scaled to support better integration of data in places attempting to implement complementary learning.

4. *Use legislative and policy tools to enable complementary learning.*

Sustaining investment in after-school, summer learning, and family involvement is vital to the success of the federal role in supporting complementary learning. But there are several other ways to be more intentional about support. The federal government could make it easier to create linkages and leverage its investments to partner with others to support programs and innovation, thus facilitating the creation of complementary learning systems. We recommend a combination of some realignment of existing funding and the creation of new sources of funding, both of which would have an impact at the federal, state, and local levels. Specifically, we recommend that the federal role include the following aspects:

- *Provide incentives for communities to create linkages with existing resources.* Because complementary learning work is fundamentally local, communities themselves need access and encouragement to use funds to link and align supports. The federal government can provide financial incentives for communities to create linkages at the district or city level and waivers that will enable communities to use existing funding streams for them.
- *Allocate new resources and develop new incentives for communities to support connections among out-of-school supports and schools.* It

is critical to have not only seed money or innovation grants to get these initiatives off the ground, but also “glue money” to foster and maintain partnerships. Because program funding usually does not come with support for partnership work, the federal government could play a larger role in providing the financing and flexibility that will make these connections happen. Federal funding could also build in requirements for linkages at the local level, particularly for connections with families.

- *Enable communities and districts to pool big funding streams* such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC), SES/Title I, and Child Care Development Funds to provide a percentage of funds for stable local after-school and summer learning programs, as well as early childhood supports. Use these pooled resources to develop individual 365/24/7 learning plans that consider participation in a

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Private support of public investments will be needed to ensure equitable access to quality complementary learning opportunities.

range of out-of-school learning opportunities from birth through high school graduation.

- *Encourage transparent state budgets and provide incentives.* The federal government could also encourage greater transparency in budgeting for children and youth by offering incentives to states to create children's budgets. These budgets would indicate to the public how money is being spent on education across agencies and what efforts are being made to advance complementary learning. There has been a recent proposal to do this in the federal budget by Senator Robert Menendez (www.menendez.senate.gov), but situating this practice at the state level would bring it closer to the point of service delivery and might also highlight differences in spending across states.
- *Use federal infrastructure to create leadership for out-of-school supports at the national level.* Infrastructure is another powerful way for the federal government to communicate the importance of reframing learning. For example, an assistant

secretary for out-of-school learning at the Department of Education would serve to coordinate efforts across agencies and leverage the work happening in different departments to create a more integrated approach to education. In addition, there has been renewed interest in funding the Federal Youth Coordination Act (FYCA), which was signed into law in 2006 but has yet to receive funding. In the summer of 2008, the inclusion of \$1 million for the FYCA in a House appropriations bill showed renewed momentum for FYCA.

5. *Explore and build public-private-nonprofit partnerships to scale and assure the quality of out-of-school supports.*

Over the past fifty years of federal investment in out-of-school learning supports, public-private partnerships have played a small but important role in augmenting and leveraging federal investments to support quality. For example, when the 21st CCLC grants

program was established, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation seized the opportunity to partner with the U.S. Department of Education. The partnership ensured that elements that the government could not support at the time – technical assistance, public will, seeding evaluation, promising practices, policy development, and communication – were supported as needed to ensure the sustainability and expansion of the grants program.

While Mott’s partnership efforts may be exceptional, this kind of private support of public investments will be needed to ensure equitable access to quality complementary learning opportunities. To develop such partnerships, we recommend that the federal government take the following actions:

- Reach out to foundations to partner with them to support out-of-school learning. Given the large philanthropic interest in and support of the better integration of school and out-of-school supports for learning, the time is ripe for the federal government to partner with foundations to build, test the value of, and, if appropriate, expand integrated reform efforts and ensure that they are of sufficient quality to achieve positive outcomes at scale.
- Provide incentives and requirements for state and local grant recipients to match federal dollars. Many funding streams currently have a local-match requirement. This approach to federal grant making stimulates public–private partnerships by requiring that out-of-school learning supports connect with other funders. Such an approach also contributes to sustainability by broadening the funding base.



Leading a New Era of Innovation and Education Reform: Proposing the Pathways to Educational Success Act

Research shows that out-of-school learning contributes to and, in fact, is necessary for positive learning and developmental outcomes. It is time, therefore, for the federal government to innovate and experiment with extended learning opportunities and time to ensure that all children are on a pathway to success, defined as high school completion and post-secondary training so that they have the skills necessary to succeed in the twenty-first century.

We acknowledge that some federal efforts to do so are already under way, such as the new Full Service Community Schools Act and the Time for Innovation Matters in Education (TIME) Act. But we conclude that these are not sufficient to push complemen-

tary learning from the shallows into the mainstream of education reform.

Thus, our final recommendation is to establish a new federal education policy – the Pathways to Educational Success Act of 2009 – which would enable districts and schools to work with communities to develop and test new local, complementary learning systems that offer the elements that research indicates are necessary for children to succeed, within a framework of shared accountability for better outcomes.

The new legislation should require an early, continuous, comprehensive, and complementary learning approach implemented by local districts in partnership with community-based and faith-based organizations and should include the following provisions:

- the creation of a place-based implementation plan for a comprehensive learning system that includes pre-K; schools; out-of-school learning supports; and health, mental health, and economic supports and that articulates how these supports will work with each other and with families to support learning;
- flexibility in the specifics of the approach to enable communities to target areas of need and build on existing resources and strengths;
- community-level governance and accountability with shared, integrated data systems;
- demonstration of public-private partnerships to support the complementary learning system.

This national strategy for complementary learning will require support from multiple stakeholders at the federal, state, and local levels, including educators, teachers, early-care providers, after-school and summer learning providers, and families. We offer our

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framework and recommendations to inform these stakeholders' efforts to redesign our current education system to include not only excellent schools but also the provision of high-quality complementary learning supports, particularly for disadvantaged children and youth. Four decades of consistent research evidence makes clear that failure to redefine learning and where and when it takes place – and to follow up with innovations that enable communities to move to a complementary learning approach – will prevent the country from reaching its national goal of educating all children.

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Urban Education Reform: Recalibrating the Federal Role

Warren Simmons

Federal policies should address community engagement and equity in order to build “smart education systems” that improve outcomes for urban children and youths.

The brief economic boom of 1990s brought an infusion of hope and energy to urban communities. The well-being of children and families in urban America were buoyed by an expanding, though increasingly stratified, labor market, housing redevelopment, and the entrepreneurial spirit brought by a new immigrants from Africa, Central America, the Caribbean, and the remnants of the former Soviet Union. During the 1990s, federal and state policies also began to treat cities more like catalysts for social and economic development, as opposed to indigent kin. As a result, urban communities experienced a brief renaissance marked by declining rates of teenage pregnancy, infant mortality, crime, and violence and rising incomes and population growth.

Public policy during that period was marked by an alliance between the public, on the one hand, and the political, financial, and business establishments, on the other. Together, these groups pushed an agenda that empha-

sized the wisdom and effectiveness of the private sector while dismissing the benefits of government and the public sector. The pursuit of excellence was extolled over the pursuit of equity in every sector, including education. Moreover, individual (private) accomplishment was privileged over community (public), with the latter perceived as an impediment to innovation and growth.

The recent economic bust has effectively destroyed the public's trust in the establishment and called into question these public policy assumptions. The nation has now experienced, if not completely learned, the harsh lessons of individual gain untethered from community well-being, as we witness home foreclosures, job losses, withered pensions, and an uncertain future that once seemed filled with promise, even if it was only attainable for a few.

The recent economic recession – for the poor, it's a depression – threatens to slow the pace of improvement in central cities that were beginning to reestablish themselves as founts for economic, cultural, and community renewal, where families seeking opportunity and inspiration joined with others to transform their lives and to forge a new society (Annenberg Institute for

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School Reform 2001). As this recession has painfully revealed, the transformative power of urban life is tapped more deeply by some and remains beyond the grasp of far too many. High proportions of low-income African American and Latino youth in urban areas continue to have their progress impeded by high rates of incarceration, displacement created by gentrification, and the lost opportunity caused by being on the wrong side of the achievement gap, the new “track” demarcating the fate of privileged and disadvantaged communities. These forces weaken and obscure the pathways to success available for disadvantaged youth as they seek to become more productive and engaged members of society, a task made more daunting in urban school systems, whose halting progress in closing the achievement gap is threatened by the loss of tax revenue caused by the downturn.

The Standards Movement: Reshaping the Federal Role

A Nation At Risk engendered a significant shift in the federal role in education in a manner unseen since the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. The *Brown* decision, while groundbreaking in significance for African Americans, followed a historical path of asserting federal involvement to address equity by eliminating legal barriers to access and/or by allocating resources to support specific groups. Traditionally, the federal government has left decisions about educational quality for all students, such as academic standards, assessment, curriculum and instruction, and school design, largely up to states and school districts (Ogletree 2005;

Fuhrman & Lazerson 2005). The *Brown* decision, after all, mandated integration with the expectation that greater access to schools would ensure greater quality. But the decision stopped well short of requiring the government to ensure that equity fostered quality, as the intervening years demonstrated so strikingly.

A Nation At Risk changed that dynamic. It inspired the standards movement, and the federal legislation it spawned (e.g., Goals 2000, the Improving America’s School Act, No Child Left Behind) used federal Title 1 funds and other resources as leverage explicitly to improve quality by encouraging states to adopt voluntary national standards; embed these standards in accountability systems; and intervene in failing schools so that all students would receive the supports they need to meet national goals and standards.

While the deadline for meeting these goals and standards has shifted from the year 2000 to NCLB’s 2014 deadline, the emphasis on all has



remained constant, while acceptance of an increased federal role has gained wider acceptance. The debate instead has turned to *how* the federal government should exert its influence, not *whether or not* it should. Moreover, with the recent passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the federal government has taken unprecedented steps to increase funding for states and districts as it reshapes its approach to how the funds should be used.

Gaps in the National Agenda: Community Engagement and Equity

ARRA’s incentive grants focus on key levers for change – educator quality, data systems, innovation, technology, more rigorous core standards and assessments, and improvement of low-performing schools. Yet, this comprehensive technical agenda has two troubling oversights – a lack of attention to the need for community engagement, coupled with an implied, rather than explicit, emphasis on equity.

Community Engagement

Despite President Obama’s background as a community organizer, the strategies outlined in ARRA proceed as though education reform occurs in a political,

social, and cultural vacuum, as if communities take up reforms based on clear and objective results alone. This belief that success sells itself represents what Paul Hill and his colleagues would call a “zone of wishful thinking” – an implied assumption that is usually held despite abundant evidence to the contrary (Hill, Campbell & Harvey 2000).

This belief that successful results compel widespread adoption has undermined the efficacy of too many research-based designs/strategies/programs and What Works clearing-houses to name here. Coburn’s (2003) seminal article on scale emphasized the importance of building ownership both inside and outside the system as a key ingredient for taking reform to scale – a point underscored in Paul Hill and colleagues’ case studies of districts whose reforms were weakened or undone by leadership instability and/or opposition from forces threatened by change (Hill, Campbell & Harvey 2000). If states and districts pursue the agenda outlined in ARRA but ignore the need to garner community ownership, they will find themselves vulnerable to resistance or



skepticism sparked by poor communication and a failure to obtain prior involvement. Predictably, this resistance often comes from groups that the reform is intended to help the most – communities whose students’ performance lies on the wrong side of the achievement gap. Their concerns, however, are often left out of early planning and decision-making tables where the agenda is *set*, as opposed to *announced*.

Undoubtedly, ARRA’s priorities were guided by research and informed by extensive meetings with elected officials, commissioners and superintendents, researchers, union leaders, the philanthropic community, and leaders of Washington-based think tanks and advocacy groups. And, given the constricted timeline for moving from planning to action, little effort was devoted to garnering knowledge and ownership beyond civic and political elites to involve those most dependent on urban systems for their children’s and community’s well-being: low-income families, African Americans, Latinos, and recent immigrants.

As a result, as usual, these critical constituencies will be asked to support reforms designed by “others” rather than participate in their development (Stone et al. 2001; Hirota and Jacobs 2003). The frustration, lack of knowledge, and distrust produced by this engagement gap positions poor parents and communities of color as an untapped and vulnerable resource that can be mobilized to oppose promising innovation based on poor political execution and unintended consequences overlooked by elites lacking in-depth knowledge and experience of the challenges and assets that exist in these communities.

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Equity – Where Art Thou?

In addition to diminishing political support and overlooking valuable assets, shortchanging the engagement of low-income families and communities of color in the reform of school systems their children attend, ARRA also repeats the reform movement’s mistake of pursuing solutions intended to work for all students. This approach, while admirable, obscures the fact that urban districts, in particular, need help in delineating and developing supports that work for particular groups of students that are present in large numbers – English language learners, students with disabilities, recent immigrants, over-age and under-credited students, and students challenged by early parenthood, childcare and work responsibilities, previous incarceration, violence,

health concerns, and other factors that contribute to the achievement gap and a lack of engagement.

While some of the Obama administration's agenda reflects an understanding of the particularly needs of urban communities – especially the “Promise Neighborhoods” initiative, modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone – the need for differentiated supports should be a priority rather than an afterthought in efforts to redefine standards, design new assessments, and turn around failing schools. Rather than lying on the periphery, equity as well as excellence should be a design principle that guides work both on what Richard Elmore calls the technical core of education – curriculum, instruction, and assessment – and on the supports students need to develop the social, cultural, and other forms of capital they need to become active participants in their own learning (Gordon & Bridgall 2005).

Unfortunately, the failure to address the both the engagement and equity gaps has been a recurring theme in recent accounts of reforms in districts such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New Orleans – communities whose districts are operating a mix or portfolio of schools, with some being operated and supported by the district (and/or state, in the case of New Orleans), and some operated by organizations with charters or agreements waiving some district policies and practices (Aspen Institute and Annenberg Institute 2006; Gold et al. 2007; Cowen Institute 2008). Grassroots and civic leaders in these communities, as well

as many educators in the schools, often lament the lack of attention paid to local values and traditions in the design of new schools and programs. They also express concerns that the new approaches replicate previous patterns of privilege due to a failure to consider basic issues such as transportation, access to information, and differentials in power, status, and fiscal resource that, if left unaddressed, reinforce old inequities.

Each of these reports underscores the importance of dealing with equity and community engagement as a top priority to ensure that system improvements or reinventions have the capacity to provide supports that can be differentiated – for example, more time for greater outreach to inform planning and decision making; targeted interventions for students with disabilities, English language learners, and over-age/under-credited students; supports for struggling, as well as highly effective educators; and curricula that embrace local aspirations as well as national ones. For instance, the absence of resources and strategies to support arts, culture, and community service are a prominent critique of existing reforms, a fault that ARRA seems to share rather than ameliorate.

Equity, Excellence, and Community Engagement: Interdependent Factors

The interdependence among equity, excellence, and community engagement is demonstrated in *Organized Communities, Stronger Schools*, an Annenberg Institute report summarizing the outcomes of organizing efforts in seven communities (Mediratta, Shah & McAlister 2008). The results of this seminal study offer promising signs that organizing fosters improved

student outcomes by increasing youth engagement and aspirations; building a climate of trust among students, parents, educators, and administrators; and informing district efforts to design, target, and distribute fiscal resources, new facilities, curriculum supports, data indicators, and professional development efforts, among other tools.

The Annenberg Institute’s support for the Coalition for Educational Justice in New York, the Urban Youth Collaborative, and community efforts to analyze the efficacy of central office policy and practice further provides an expanding portfolio of examples of elite–grassroots partnerships that span the gaps between research, policy, and practice while strengthening reform by building political will.

In addition to building political will, broadening participation in research, planning, and decision making to include communities with students enrolled in urban school systems also corrects a flaw inherent in approaches that rely on the perspectives and values of elites. Too often, the elite view focuses almost exclusively on the need to redesign the nation’s education system in order to prepare students for college and the workplace. Few would argue that these represent primary goals of our educational system, but throughout our nation’s history communities have also argued and fought for schools that prepare students to:

- contribute to civic life;
- form and strengthen families;
- value and contribute to the arts;
- respect local culture and traditions while becoming part of the mainstream.

Policy-making and reform tables dominated by elites often fail to hear voices that emphasize these goals.



Too often, the elite view focuses almost exclusively on the need to redesign the nation’s education system in order to prepare students for college and the workplace.



Worse, as the policies generated by elites reach local communities that are more diverse, complex, and challenged than originally perceived, the gaps between policy and local capacity undermine the credibility and impact of national goals and strategies. For instance, NCLB's 2014 deadline for getting all students to meet standards in an era when urban schools have been chronically underfunded by the very states responsible for intervening in failing schools and districts presents a contradiction that might be clearer when viewing education from the bottom up than it is when looking and planning from the top down. Similarly, policies that exhort districts and schools to make annual improvements in literacy and math test scores

in cities while being silent about rising unemployment and economic stratification, increasing youth violence and homicide, and increasing proportions of new immigrants are tantamount to planting powerful ideas in ground that lacks essential nutrients.

While the Annenberg Institute's work over the past ten years demonstrates that urban school systems can and should do more to redesign schools and central office supports to advance learning and development and that there are numerous schools and school districts that beat the odds, many of the groups that inform our work ask why the odds must continue to be so great against low-income students and communities of color. If ARRA fails to help local education reformers and advocates – particularly those working in diverse and rapidly changing urban communities – develop partnerships that foster excellence while also addressing equity, the results produced by this unprecedented infusion of fiscal and intellectual resources will once again fall short of the goal.

In our view, community-centered education reform can provide the political, social, and moral capital required to counter forces that derail and delay the succession of reforms tried since *Brown v. Board of Education*. The existence of the standards movement has clarified one important aim for community engagement – that is, communities should act to ensure that all students and schools receive the supports needed to meet high academic standards. In addition to this central aim, we believe that effective community-centered education reform should be guided by the following tenets.

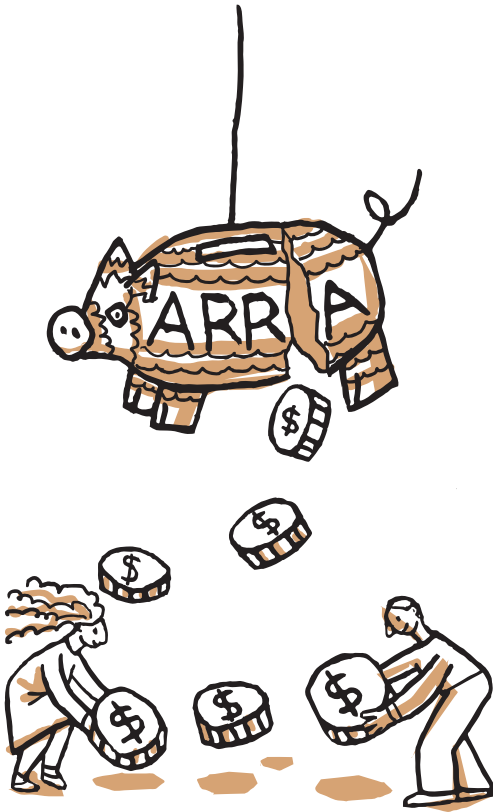
- The specific needs of students, schools, and families are best understood and addressed when the local context is treated as a potential resource for development rather than solely as a neutral or negative condition.
- Building capacity for incremental or radical reform requires, but goes beyond, securing additional funding for schools or gaining support for new school/district policies and practices; it also entails revitalizing communities so that families and entire neighborhoods can offer the supports children and youth need to achieve the full range of positive outcomes (e.g., academic, health, emotional, social, spiritual).
- Broad-based coalitions of “communities” are formed not just to increase participation in the work of education reform, but also to engender a productive ecology for school reform. Thus, the inclusion of underrepresented groups becomes a primary objective and not a secondary outcome.
- Enhancing the capacity of “communities” to accomplish their work involves an examination of fundamental issues of power, race, class, and diversity that have traditionally undermined the efficacy of urban school reforms and muted the voices of students and their families.
- Researchers, practitioners, and advocates must acknowledge the multidisciplinary nature of schooling and explore the intersections of teaching and learning, community engagement, youth development, economic revival, and college readiness.

- Efforts to link education reform and reinvention to community engagement and development school be guided by research and evidence-based practices.

A Smart Education System

These principles require a significant shift in thinking about urban school districts and their relationship to the settings in and around them. A community-centered approach to reform underscores the need for school systems to develop “community” within schools, among schools, and in relationship to the neighborhoods and cities they rely on to support students’ learning and development not just fiscally, but social, physically, culturally, and morally as well. This approach represents a departure from strategies that treat families and neighborhoods narrowly as clients or simply as sources for homework support, but as part of what the Charles Stewart Mott

Community-centered education reform can provide the political, social, and moral capital required to counter forces that derail and delay the succession of reforms tried since *Brown v. Board of Education*.



Foundation's Time, Learning, and After School Task Force called a New Day for Learning (Mott Foundation 2007). In their view, this would require systems, families, and communities to:

- expand the definition of student success to incorporate twenty-first century competencies that emphasize creativity and problem-solving, among other skills and dispositions;
- use research-based knowledge to design and integrate new learning supports;
- provide educators with new opportunities for leadership and professional development.

To meet these aims, we believe the resources furnished by ARRA should be leveraged to convert districts into organizations that function in concert with municipal agencies, cultural organizations, businesses, higher-education institutions, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups, rather than in isolation from or in opposition to this broad network of potential partners and resources. ARRA could encourage state and local education agencies to become part of what we call a smart education system by emphasizing the need for state education agencies and local education agencies to:

- maintain multiple and substantial cross-sector partnerships that provide a broad range of supports to young people and their families;
- achieve a broad set of positive outcomes – including, but not limited to academic achievement – for students, families, and communities and gather evidence of progress;
- develop indicators, measures, and processes that foster shared accountability across partner organizations and groups;

- create a systematic approach for bringing the work to scale;
- develop strategies for managing power differentials, for example by creating meaningful roles for all stakeholders and shifting partner relations away from the standard grassroots–grassstops conventions.

While ARRA is supportive of New Day for Learning and smart education system principles, they tend to be implicit rather than explicit themes in the priorities outlined in ARRA, with the exception of the call for Promise Neighborhoods. However, Promise Neighborhoods are treated more like a demonstration project than an overarching strategy for rebuilding the nation's education system in urban areas. Elevating the conceptual underpinnings of Promise Neighborhoods from a project to a major strategy would enhance the coherence of an array of initiatives and make their whole greater than the sum of their parts. To further this aim, the Department of Education itself must also examine how to integrate and align the fragmented bevy of programs, offices, and funding streams that reinforce the programmatic divides between equity and excellence, school and after-school, school and community, pre-K and K–12, and lower- and higher-adult education. Simply saying “pre-K to 16” doesn't create a system that makes it happen without concerted effort across the layers of institutions and agencies that support the learning and development of our nation's children and youth.

The recent economic crisis and the pain it has brought have created a brief unity of focus. As we consider new ways to transform the nation's economic, housing, health, transportation, and fiscal infrastructure, we must not forget the need to create a new education infrastructure as well.

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